

Testimony to the Human Services Committee, Connecticut General Assembly
February 19, 2015

Re: S.B. 895, An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance

From: Louise Simmons, Professor of Social Work

I am Professor Louise Simmons of the UConn School of Social Work. My comments are based on my own work and represent my own views, not that of the University or the School of Social Work. I have, however, been involved with issues of welfare programs for over 20 years, both as an academic and as a community member, including a term on the Hartford City Council in the early 1990s when I chaired the Council's Human Services Committee, as it is now known.

I support Senate Bill 895 and believe that this represents the minimum that we can do to bring our TFA program into the 21st Century reality for poor families. I urge this committee to adopt this bill and support it for passage this session.

Yet, we can do more and there are several aspects of our TFA program that need to be considered:

1. Connecticut has the shortest time limits in the country our program covered by TANF funds: the **shortest** of all 50 states and U.S. possessions. We have some of the strictest provisions of all the states and the least realistic expectations of TFA recipients. We have historically imposed some of the harshest limitations for training and education of all the states. This does not correspond to the needs of recipients nor does it correspond to the needs of the labor market.
2. We have significantly reduced our caseloads over the years, **not** because we have been so successful in helping recipients find family supporting jobs but because we have sanctioned, timed-off, and made it difficult to get the appropriate assistance for poor families with children.
3. The jobs that TFA recipients are getting are among the lowest paying jobs in the economy: in the January 2015 "At A Squint" brochure that the Connecticut Department of Labor publishes each month about participants in the Jobs First Program, the report on wages of employed participants detailed that some 74% of employed TFA recipients earned below \$10.00 per hour and 48% earned below \$9.15 per hour. Even if these individuals are receiving cash assistance or other benefits, their families remain in poverty.
4. Our public high education institutions have 120,000 students, but most of this education is out of reach to those who most deeply need it. Think about the 30,000 students at UConn, the 34,000 students in CCSU institutions or the 57,000 students in community colleges – they are on their way to enhanced knowledge, skills, and earning potential. Yet our 13,700 TFA recipients (as of January) do not have easy pathways to higher education available to them. With 21 month time limits, they cannot receive associate degrees, let